

ARTICLE

THE ROLE OF STORYTELLING IN PRESERVING AFRICA'S SPIRIT BY CONSERVING THE CONTINENT'S FAUNA AND FLORA

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ABSTRACT

The importance of oral tradition, indigenous stories and the knowledge and wisdom contained therein are fundamental to undertake as many initiatives as possible to protect the continent's fauna and flora from extinction. This article is a phenomenological qualitative study. It is based on an extensive content analysis of literature, oral histories, photographs and audio-visual footage concerning narratives and folklore relating to Africa's fauna and flora. For the purposes of this article, the content sample focuses specifically on narratives related to the African elephant, black rhinoceros and the lion. The article also relates to experiences of individuals in Kenya and South Africa involved in conservation efforts to protect Africa's wildlife. The geographical proximity of the collected narratives stretches from the Timbavati, in South Africa, through to Northern Kenya. This article illustrates how indigenous knowledge and oral histories have influenced Western mythology and thinking. The article also explores the significance attached by scholars to the continent's oral histories and indigenous knowledge and links knowledge to Jung, astrology and ancient symbolism. The discussion emphasises the importance of good conservation strategies for all areas of Africa to protect the fauna and flora as well as Africa's oral histories and indigenous knowledge.

Keywords: audio-visual archives; ecological intelligence; fauna and flora; folklore; indigenous knowledge



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INTRODUCTION

From the depths of Africa's rivers and lakes, wide open savannahs and dense forests, exists an array of legends and folklore. These narratives¹ are illustrations of how people perceived the Earth, Creation and Judgement Day, all communicated through the different animals and plants (Miller and Handler 1979, 7–8). The Creator knew how much the Earth's animals and vegetation needed protection, by encoding their importance through oral history and traditions. Rituals and ceremonies are conducted with dances and chants. These are some of the ways these ancient narratives of Africa's fauna and flora have been revealed and then communicated to the next generation. Besides music and storytelling, the rock paintings and etchings found throughout Africa also communicate about the origins of life (McCallum 2005, 53). Many of the narratives involving different animals and plants can also be found in the narratives found in the Old Testament of the Bible (NKJV 1982 Isaiah 11, 1–6).

The creation narrative in the book of Genesis has been passed down to all generations through oral traditions, songs, melodies and chants. Melodious legends and folklore are also depicted in the rocky outcrops and pyramids found on the African continent. The songs, calls, rhythms and beats from all the Earth's fauna and flora tell us about the past and of future predictions (Tucker 2010, 57–60). Storytelling in its earliest formats can be traced to the Garden of Eden and story of creation, being one of the first stories that young children are exposed to, whether as bed-time reading activities or in the form of songs and chants at Sunday school. The story of creation and freeing of Israelites from slavery is well-documented in the books of Genesis and Exodus (NKJV 1982).

RESEARCH PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Oral histories and indigenous knowledge relating to Africa's fauna and flora are fundamental to endeavours throughout the continent to protect these natural resources from exploitation. It is also important for measures to be in place to protect heritage assets from extinction by individuals and entities with little interest in the continent, its people and natural resources. The research objectives moulding this article are tracing the oral histories on African animals being exploited to the brink of extinction; exploring the synergies between oral histories and indigenous knowledge from the African continent, with Western mythology and thinking; and analysing the role of oral histories and indigenous knowledge with regard to Jung, cosmology and ancient symbolisms.

1 This paper was presented at the Children and Heritage Seminar in Nelspruit on September 9, 2016. It is part of a larger project to capture narratives related to animals, plants and indigenous knowledge in southern Africa.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this article is based on two prominent themes covered in the literature of McCallum (2005) and Tucker (2010) regarding mythology, indigenous knowledge and the value of oral histories with specific reference to the African continent. The second theme concerns the assertion of McCallum (2005) and Tucker (2010) about the interconnectedness between mythology, Jung, ancient symbolisms and conservation. In this theme, this scholar explains the significance of mythology and folklore in terms of Jung and ancient symbolism.

MYTHOLOGY AND INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE RELATED TO FAUNA AND FLORA

Indigenous knowledge is intimately intertwined with animal and plant life found on the African continent. Tucker (2010) contends that with every African animal or plant species that is killed, a large slice of knowledge is taken with them into the abyss. Sacred icons of other races and nations are generally respected, revered and protected, but Africa's icons in its fauna and flora are decimated, hunted, poached and exploited with little impunity. Oral tradition is an effective method of making people aware of animals and plants while encouraging efforts to protect the continent's fauna and flora.

According to McCallum (2005,153), every creature is united inwardly and outwardly with creation narratives. Through folklores and legends guidance is provided to human beings who learn to accept the "great indifferences" of Mother Earth, whose purpose is neither to punish, bless, nor exert cruelty (McCallum 2005,153). It is impossible for us to comprehend and adequately explain real experiences in our lives or synchronise motives of individuals, like Daphney Sheldrick and Saba Hamilton-Douglas, who come to the rescue of endangered species. It also includes individuals like Mother Theresa, who came to the rescue of people suffering in the ghettos of Kolkata (McCallum 2005,158–159).

Knowledge is what McCallum (2005,1) calls "ecological intelligence". An explanation of this phenomenon is the basis of a culture of rationality. Ecological intelligence is the miracle of the biology of knowing that within and beneath the skin of our hands is a universe of unconscious life, and that every cell that makes up a human being has its own individual life (McCallum 2005, 125). Ecological intelligence is about knowing ourselves, as creatures with a soul and the Earth being prepared to be changed by that awareness (McCallum 2005, 86).

Poetry, as a means of communicating about fauna and flora and being touched with a person's soul, is a language of ecological intelligence – not only in the form of protest, but also of love and hope. According to McCallum (2005), all cultures worldwide have myths, legends and fairy tales. All of these narratives have "fantastical" origins of the world and life, heroes and villains, of how we as people – children, mothers,

fathers, grandparents, friends and colleagues should behave with kindness and tolerance (McCallum 2005, 23).

All Western civilisation mythology is based on Africa's legends and messages (Tucker 2010, 72–73). Africa is the birthplace of all the world's narratives. Africa is the garden of creation and all myths, legends and folklores originate from this continent. Africa's *wag- 'n-bietjie* was probably the burning bush that Moses encountered when he received his instructions from the Creator to free the Israelites from Egypt's tyrannical grip (McCallum 2005, 15). Through myths, legends, poetry and songs we undertake our initial steps to rediscover ourselves in Nature (McCallum 2005, 31). Ecological intelligence is the process of learning "to see the world with both eyes, of waking up and becoming conscious of the nature and inevitability of suffering" (McCallum 2005, 86). McCallum (2005) contends that our conscious bond with fauna explains why the stories relating to birds, animals and different flora were brought back by the early explorers and philanthropists like Livingstone and Van der Post (McCallum 2005, 197; Van der Post 1972). As emphasised by Lisa Karanja from the *African Wildlife Foundation* Advisory Council for Kenya, if we cannot find a balance between nature and economic development, human beings will suffer the most (Karanja 2016).

JUNG AND CONSERVATION

Postmodern psychology, as discussed by Jones (2003) in an article on Jung's view on mythology, embodies two themes, namely the social mind and the narrative self. Scholars such as Varela and Harré (1996) agree with the concepts of the social mind and the narrative self as fundamental elements in mythmaking. The roles of myth in narrative psychology which refers to personal myths is the stories by which we live (Jones 2003, 620). Jung's view of myths and narratives are that it is important for psychologists to question the identification of the myth, with a view to explaining the human mind (Jones 2003, 621). Segal (1999) contends that myth is not about the world, but rather about our minds.

The debate among psychologists is whether there is consensus between Jung's theories and postmodern psychology. It is possible to have a common ground between these narratives and what people employ in order to understand themselves and the environment. Myths and legends consist of different individuals, be they warriors, travellers, caregivers, lovers, healers, teachers and other role-players. Antagonists, protagonists and overarching themes with obstacles to overcome are the key components of stories (McAdams 1999, 487). McAdams (1999) describes narrative psychology as how we arrive at sustaining ourselves as unique and continuous individuals. Narrative psychology is about making one's own autobiography (Jones 2003, 626). Myths and legends are like the "painter's pallet" (Jones 2003, 627) and these demonstrate the closeness of rock art and etchings as the palette on which to paint the myths, legends and folklores. Rock art and etchings can be found throughout the African continent and beyond (Jones 2003).

According to McCallum (2005), there is a connection between psychology and the environment. The conservation of fauna and flora is more important to people than people are to the fauna and flora. Such forms of life are crucial to our survival. McCallum (2005) explains Carl Jung's concept of the collective unconscious, archetypes, projects, individualisation and the concept of the human shadow in our psychological vocabulary. The collective unconscious is the domain of survival-orientated memories, myths, motives, emoticons and behavioural patterns common to everyone (McCallum 2005, 83). It is further contended by McCallum that individuals have "imagination that observes, analyses, interprets and synthesizes, pre-empting the capacity, to understand and predict the thoughts and feelings of others" which are communicated through the myths, legends and folktales (McCallum 2005, 161). These narratives and world views are crucial to individuals undertaking projects to protect the elephants, rhinoceroses and lions, and indeed all fauna and flora, from being exploited to the verge of extinction. People need sacred narratives. Through these sacred narratives we achieve ecological intelligence and form a religious cosmology (McCallum 2005, 202).

METHODOLOGY

This article utilised the qualitative research method to analyse the content of stories related to African fauna and flora. In addition, accounts from individuals involved in conservation efforts related to Africa's wildlife, the environment and cultural heritage were collected. Phenomenology is the philosophical approach that the author deemed appropriate for the purpose of this article. This approach was selected as the article emphasises the importance of the environment, the existence of plants and animals, the role of mythology and the human psyche. Phenomenology is utilised by scholars in the fields of psychiatry and psychology to understand human behaviour by also understanding nature and is a theme deeply rooted in Jung's writings (Brooke 2015). The effect of the environment on the human psyche is a fundamental theme of McCallum's (2005) ecological intelligence.

The data collected for the purpose of this research are from literature related to local stories in southern Africa and Kenya, documentary evidence, literary work, oral accounts, site visits to Mapungubwe, the Timbavati area and the Kruger, and audiovisual footage relating to Africa's fauna and flora. The samples selected for the purpose of this article are narratives and footage on elephants, rhinoceroses and lions, and tales from individuals involved in the conservation of these animals. Evidence was obtained from Tanda Tula in the Timbavati area, the Kruger Park, Mapungubwe National Park, Botswana, Samburu and Meru National Parks in Kenya.

DISCUSSION OF THE EVIDENCE

A collection of folklores and mythical narratives are from an array of different authors on Africa, such as Laurens van der Post (1972); collections of children's books by

Nick Greaves (2000, 2004); to oral testimonies from Johannes Masalesa (2016) at Mapungubwe; oral testimonies of Saba Hamilton-Douglas (2002); and the writings of Daphney Sheldrick (2012). The narratives identified, specifically for the purposes of this article, are those related to elephants, rhinoceroses and lions. In essence, the narratives are revealed from South to North along the Rift Valley, and cover the range from 29 degrees to 31 degrees longitude, which in essence covers both the eastern and western banks of the Nile River. The 31 degrees longitude meridian is referred to as a Neolithic meridian and was, in ancient times, the same as the Greenwich meridian of today (Herschel and Lederer 2003).

ELEPHANT NARRATIVES AND CONSERVATION INITIATIVES

In 1972, Laurens van der Post compiled a narrative on Hunter's Drift in Botswana, that he based on folklore and legends revealed by the San and Matabele. In his writings entitled, *A story like the wind*, he gave an account of a bull elephant who was known by local communities as the "Uprooter of Great Trees" (Van der Post 1972, 186). This elephant was regarded as mad and his spirit was attributed to a presence, within the body of a magician that if made angry would be malicious. Van der Post illustrated how elephants like Marula fruit and how the unusual behaviour could be ascribed to their being drunk on Marula fruit (Van der Post 1972, 186). In the same narrative, Van der Post (1972, 217) illustrated how the elephant was regarded as good and wise and how they make their way through the bush as wise men, like a river seeking the Great Water. According to Matabele legends, elephants are not regarded as impulsive creatures and never do anything without good reason (Van der Post 1972, 217).

Individuals in Kenya, like Saba Hamilton-Douglas and Daphney Sheldrick, have dedicated their lives to ensuring that the African elephant must not be driven to extinction. Their stories are well-documented as are their efforts in encouraging ecotourism. At the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, outside Nairobi National Park, Daphney Sheldrick has daily schedules when she is teaching the youth and tourists about the importance of Africa's natural heritage, and she rescues young elephants when their mothers have been killed by poachers (Sheldrick 2012). These two individuals are evident of efforts to preserve the African elephant. Saba Hamilton-Douglas has also been involved with elephant conservation. She and her father, Iain Douglas, were instrumental in creating a database to preserve elephants and using technology to manage these pachyderms (Save the Elephants Facebook Page, 2015).

BLACK RHINOCEROS NARRATIVES AND CONSERVATION EFFORTS

The rhinoceros was one of the last animals to be created, as the Creator knew rhinoceroses would have a shorter life span. The rhinoceros was unhappy with his coat. The Creator gave the rhinoceros a porcupine quill to repair his coat. Unfortunately, the rhinoceros swallowed the needle and to this day scatters his dung in search of this needle (Greaves 2000, 64–65). This narrative is similar in both the Kenya and Ndebele traditions. The Matabele view the rhinoceros as a bad-tempered god, who is always hurrying along and charges in straight lines, crashing over everything (Van der Post 1974, 216–217). The importance of these stories is to explain the nature of the rhinoceros, the important role these animals play in the ecosystem and the limited timespan that protects these animals from extinction. People like Karen Trendler undertake initiatives in South Africa to save rhinoceros calves left stranded when the mothers have been poached for their horn (Rhino Orphanage 2016). Initiatives like the Rhino Orphanage are aiming to keep the rhinoceros safe by assisting in relocating them to countries where they can be effectively protected (Rhino Orphanage 2016).

NARRATIVES RELATED TO THE LION

An intriguing narrative surrounds the white lions of the Timbavati. The Tsonga narrative explains how on a particular night, a big star appeared in the heavens as bright as the sun and descended to earth. The star landed in the area of the Timbi-le-Vaa-ti, which was ruled by Queen Numbi (Tucker 2010). For several years after that event, all the animals in the Timbavati area gave birth to young animals that are born white with blue eyes. This phenomenon of white lions with blue eyes is a significant feature of these animals. The phenomenon of blue eyes is not restricted to the lions but also occurs in leopards. The most well-known leopard with blue eyes is a leopard called *Marula*, and is frequently sighted by the Tanda Thula and Kambuka Safari Lodges (Woodward 2014). The Timbavati is regarded as a sacred place where no hunting is allowed. The San refer to the lions of this area by the name *tsau* which means star beast. The San also regard the white lions to be the children of the Creator. Sangomas believe that the white lions are evidence of snow animals whose thick mane and paw formation are well adapted for glacial conditions (McBride 1975).

According to Linda Tucker (2010), the areas where the white lions are frequently found are in the 31 degree longitudinal meridian which lines up with the Sphinx in Egypt and Great Zimbabwe. Several cultural sites are located along this particular meridian, which also lines up with the Leo constellation (Herschel and Lederer 2003). All of our myths and legends regarding lions essentially have their origins in Africa. This includes all biblical narratives, such as Daniel and the lions' den; stories of Hercules; and fables, such as Androcles removing the thorn from the foot of a lion (Tucker 2010, 40,150). The

importance of the lion to Great Britain is no more evident with the two giant lion statues found in Trafalgar Square, in London (Tucker 2010, 40).

In 2002, conservationist Saba Douglas-Hamilton gave an account for a British Broadcasting Company (BBC) programme on a lioness in the Samburu Game Reserve, in Kenya, that had adopted an oryx calf. The very moving account and dramatic footage were regarded by the local communities as a visual record of the miracle of the lion and the lamb narrative described in the Bible, in the book of Isaiah. Unfortunately, the oryx calf was eventually killed by a male lion. This lioness went on to adopt a few more calves. Most noteworthy was that all the commentary and discussions that the event generated had been on the scientific knowledge that this relationship for both animals had been unsustainable. The spiritual message of this event was afforded very little insight. This could only be explained through local folklore and an oral tradition. The narrative believed that the lioness was not able to have her own cubs and she had been ostracised by her pride. Fundamentally, this narrative coincides with the biblical lamb and lion parable. This sighting would be an indication that the Bible's parables and psalms are narratives based on actual sightings occurring in the natural environment, many of which are beyond logical and scientific explanations.

CONCLUSION

This paper explored the significance attached by scholars, like McCallum (2005), to the significance of the continent's oral histories. It also addressed the association of this knowledge with Jung, cosmology and ancient symbolism. The discussion emphasised the contributions of individuals involved with conservation endeavours in Kenya and South Africa. These champions have committed their livelihood to protecting Africa's fauna and flora, and the accompanying oral histories and indigenous knowledge. Important too are for these narratives to be continuously shared and passed down through the generations. The significance of the cultural and natural legends and folklore should not be lost in the lure of technology. Africa's fauna, flora and cultural phenomena must be preserved and protected from individuals and multinational corporations, with little interest in the well-being of the continent, its people and natural resources.

In the previous millennium, we have witnessed some dramatic changes and events in the world. Ecological intelligence enables us to see the world with both eyes open and remain aware of nature's inevitability with regard to suffering (McCallum 2005, 86). Fabulous beasts like the phoenix, sphinx and centaur as well as birds, sea creatures, insects and domestic animals touch the human psyche. Toy animals and animal stories also touch our human psyche. All of these are part of who we are and of the imagination (McCallum 2005, 102–103).

Fauna and flora are extensions of all our senses when we allow them to be. Birds like weavers and herons know when the rivers will rise and the rains will come. This is referred to as a "quantum leap of consciousness" (McCallum 2005, 136). The Garden of

Eden is in Africa. If we observe carefully, the Genesis and Exodus narratives are evident in many areas of the African continent. Sites such as Mapungubwe, Timbavati and Great Zimbabwe must be conserved along with the natural and cultural heritage found on the African continent.

The natural and cultural significance of Africa's fauna and flora should both be respected and protected. The continent's animals should not only exist in picture books and as fantastical creatures, such as unicorns and dragons. Humans are assigned the task of protecting and preventing the continent's animals and plants from being destroyed because their ivory, horns or claws are revered by other nations as cures for diseases and impotence. Africa's natural and cultural heritage needs to be protected from exploitation.

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